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600 Miles Is Not Enough: Atlantic Coast Pipeline to Expand

By: Lisa Sorg

Submitted: 09/29/2017--1:42 pm

Seven hundred, 800 miles? How far will the Atlantic Coast Pipeline go? Farther than North Carolina, it turns out. The Associated Press reported this morning that the ACP will extend well into South Carolina, undermining the utilities' contention that the purpose of the project is to supply natural gas to underserved areas of the state and Virginia.

The AP based its story on an audio recording of remarks by Dominion vice president and general manager of Southern pipeline operations Dan Weekly. "Even though it dead-ends at Lumberton (North Carolina) — of course, 12 miles (19 kilometers) to the border — everybody knows it's not going to end in Lumberton," Weekly told attendees at an energy conference, according to the AP.

Dominion co-owns the ACP with Duke Energy, Piedmont Gas and Southeastern Gas Company.

In North Carolina, opponents and critics of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline have long speculated that Lumberton, the alleged end of the 600-mile project, was merely a way station. There were already plans for the ACP to connect to a PSNC line in Robeson County and continue to the South Carolina border.

At the conference, Weekly reportedly said the pipeline could carry natural gas through the middle of South Carolina or veer eastward toward the coast.

The news is important because in their federal filings, the utilities never mentioned any planned expansion into South Carolina. The AP quoted a spokesperson from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, responsible for approving the project, as saying if the ACP expands into another state the utilities will have to go through the application process again.

Although just this month, the utilities had asked FERC to fast-track its approval of the project, the timing of Weekly's remarks coincide with a major and more recent development in South Carolina's energy sector. Duke Energy recently announced it was killing plans to build its Lee Nuclear Plant; another South Carolina utility also abandoned its nuclear project. That leaves South Carolina without some of its projected energy generation.

As for the North Carolina portion, state environmental officials have already delayed their decision on water quality and buffer certification until at least mid-December. In a detailed letter to the ACP owners, the state asked for more extensive information about certain aspects of the plan.